

Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

Selangor & Negeri Sembilan (Chapter)

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Pages 19

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Coverage includes: Batu Caves, Forestry Research Institute of Malaysia, Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser), Putrajaya, Klang Valley, Kuala Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Seremban and Port Dickson.

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Selangor & Negeri Sembilan

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Why Go?

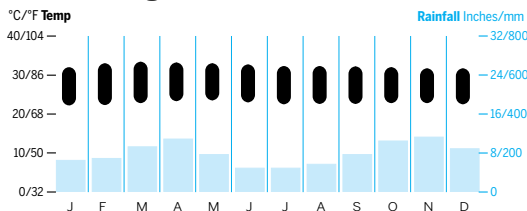
Selangor (www.tourismselangor.org), Malaysia's most urbanised and industrialised state, offers some top tourist attractions, such as the Batu Caves and the Forestry Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), both easy half-day trips from Kuala Lumpur (KL). Rewarding stopovers include lush Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser) and the old royal capital of Kuala Selangor, with its wildlife-watching and *kampung* (village) atmosphere.

South of KL, Malaysia's administrative capital of Putrajaya is packed with striking contemporary architecture. Further south, in Seremban, state capital of Negeri Sembilan (<http://tourismnegerisembilan.com>), you can learn about Minangkabau culture and feast on local cuisine.

Towns along the murky Strait of Melaka aren't the best in Malaysia for a beach holiday, but if that's what you want, then Port Dickson has pleasant beaches and resorts of every calibre. It's also near Cape Rachado Forest Reserve, the last remaining patch of native jungle on the west coast.

When to Go

Kuala Selangor



Jan–Feb During Thaipusam the Batu Caves are mobbed by one million pilgrims.

Mar–Apr At Cape Rachado Forest Reserve watch the raptors' annual northwards migration.

Jun Escape the lowland heat at Fraser Hill's International Bird Race.



Selangor & Negeri Sembilan Highlights

1 Going bird-watching in the lush, climatically cool hill station resort of **Fraser's Hill** (Bukit Fraser, p102)

2 Tucking into delicious Indian and Chinese food in historic **Klang** (p104)

3 Cooling off on the water slides and in the tidal pool at **Sunway Lagoon** (p105)

4 Viewing the monumental new Malaysian architecture of **Putrajaya** (p104) from a boat on its central lake

5 Getting a treetop look at Kuala Lumpur (KL) from the canopy walkway at the **Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM)** (p100)

6 Climbing the 272 steps to the psychedelic Hindu galleries of **Batu Caves** (p99)

7 Hiking through the verdant jungle and hidden beaches of the **Cape Rachado Forest Reserve** (p113)

8 Marvelling at the intricate woodwork of Sri Menanti's grand **Istana Lama** (p112)

History

In the 15th century, all of what is now Selangor and Negeri Sembilan was controlled by Melaka. With the rising power of the Bugis (a seafaring group of warrior-like Malay settlers from Sulawesi) in Selangor, Minangkabau settlers from Sumatra felt increasingly insecure, so they turned to their former homeland for protection. Raja Melewar, a Minangkabau prince from Sumatra, was appointed the first *yang di-pertuan besar* (head of state) of Negeri Sembilan in 1773. Out of this initial union emerged a loose confederation of nine *luak* (fiefdoms). The royal capital of Negeri Sembilan was established at Sri Menanti.

After Melaka fell to the Portuguese in the early 16th century, control of Selangor was also hotly contested, partly because of its rich tin reserves. By the middle of the 18th century, the Buginese had established a sultanate, based at Kuala Selangor. A century later the success of the tin trade and the growing wealth of the Chinese communities in the fledgling city of Kuala Lumpur led to conflicts both among and between the Selangor chiefs and the miners. The outcome was a prolonged civil war, which slashed tin production and destroyed KL. In 1874, with the civil war over, the British took control. The sultan was forced to accede to the installation of a British Resident at Klang, and for the next 25 years the state prospered, largely on the back of another boom in tin prices.

Negeri Sembilan was likewise rich in tin, so for much of the 19th century it also suffered from unrest and political instability motivated by greed. After Raja Melewar's death, the title of *yang di-pertuan besar* was taken by a succession of Sumatran chiefs, until a series of protracted tin-related wars in 1824–32 led to the severance of political ties with Sumatra.

British Resident Frank Swettenhamajoined the sultans of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Perak and Pahang into an alliance that eventually became the Federated Malay States in 1896. The federation was centrally administered from a phoenix-like KL, which had become a well-ordered and prosperous city by the turn of the 20th century. In 1974 Selangor's sultan ceded KL as a federal territory, and Shah Alam took over the role of state capital. In the late 1990s the federal administrative capital of Putrajaya was also cleaved off from Selangor.

SELANGOR

Batu Caves

Just 13km north of KL, a short distance off the Ipoh road, a towering limestone outcrop is home to these impressive caves, officially discovered around 120 years ago by American naturalist William Hornaday. A short time later a small Hindu shrine was built in the vast open space, later known as Temple Cave.

An enormous golden statue of Muruga, also known as Lord Subramaniam, to whom the caves are dedicated, stands at the foot of a flight of 272 steps leading up to Temple Cave. Beyond the towering main cavern, the space opens to an atrium-like cave at the rear. Monkeys scamper around the shrines, which are dwarfed by the scale of the cave.

Sights

Dark Cave

CAVE

(www.darkcavemalaysia.com/site; adult/child RM35/25; ☀10am–5pm Tue–Fri, 10.30am–5.30pm Sat & Sun, tours every 20 min) At step 204, branch off to the Dark Cave to follow a 45-minute guided tour along around 800m of the 2km of surveyed passageways with seven different chambers. Dramatic limestone formations, two species of bats and hundreds of other life forms, including the rare trapdoor spider, make this a fascinating, excursion. See the website about organising a more challenging two- to three-hour tour that involves crawling through the cave's narrow tunnels.

Cave Villa

CAVE

(☎012-910 8389; www.cavevilla.com.my; adult/child RM15/7; ☀9am–6pm) At the base of the outcrop you have to pay to enter the Cave



THAIPUSAM AT BATU CAVES

Each year in late January or early February a million pilgrims converge on the Batu Caves during the three days of Thaipusam (p571). Lord Muruga's silver chariot takes pride of place as it makes its way from the Sri Mahamariamman Temple in KL's Chinatown to the caves. Get here by dawn if you want to see anything amid the crowds, and bring food and water with you.



RIMBU DAHAN

Check the website of **Rimbun Dahan** (6038-3690; www.rimbundahan.org/home.html), a private property about 20 minutes' drive west of Kepong and one hour from KL, for the handful of times a year when it's open to the public.

There's a gallery inside this centre for developing traditional and contemporary art, as well as buildings designed by Hijias Kasturi, the architect of the striking Tabung Haji and Menara Maybank buildings in KL. The property also boasts a 19th-century traditional Malay house and an indigenous garden.

Villa, fronted by a pond packed with koi carp. Psychedelically painted sculptures of Hindu gods arranged to tell parables from the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Hindu scriptures decorate the caves. Outside there's a small bird sanctuary, an area containing over 100 different species of reptiles (including a 7.6m-long python) and classical Indian dance shows on the half hour.

i Getting There & Away

KTM Komuter trains terminate at Batu Caves station (RM1.30 from KL Sentral, 25 minutes, every 30 minutes). Bus U6 (RM2.50, 45 minutes, every 30 minutes) leaves from Medan Pasar in KL. A taxi from KL costs around RM20.

Forestry Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM)

Birdsong and wall-to-wall greenery replaces the drone of traffic and air-conditioning at the **Forestry Research Institute of Malaysia** (FRIM; 6279 7575; www.frim.gov.my; Selangor Darul Ehsan; admission RM5; Canopy Walkway adult/child RM10/1; information centre 8am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-4pm Sat & Sun; Canopy Walkway 9.30am-1.30pm Tue-Thu, Sat & Sun; museum 9am-4pm Tue-Sun; Malay Teahouse 9am-7pm). The highlight of this 600-hectare jungle park at Kepong, part of the Bukit Lagong Forest Reserve 16km northwest of KL, is its **Canopy Walkway**. The 200m walkway, hanging a vertigo-inducing 30m above the forest floor, is reached by a steep trail from FRIM's **information centre**, where you should go first to register and to pick up maps of the

other trails in the park. Heading down from the walkway, the trail picks its way through the jungle to a shady picnic area where you can cool off in a series of shallow waterfalls. The return hike, incorporating the walkway, takes around two hours. Bring water with you.

Elsewhere in the park there's a couple of handsome traditional wooden houses, relocated from Melaka and Terengganu, and a **museum**, which has some interesting displays explaining the rainforest habitat and the forest-related research carried out by FRIM. Several arboreta highlight different types of trees, there's a wetland area and a pond containing a giant arapaima.

i Getting There & Away

Take a KTM Komuter train to Kepong (RM1.30) and then a taxi (RM5); arrange for the taxi to pick you up again later. Bring a picnic to enjoy in the park; alternatively the FRIM's canteen is open all day and serves decent home-cooked Malay food (around RM10 including a drink).

Hulu Klang & Gombak

Laid out over 62 hectares around a central lake, **Zoo Negara** (National Zoo; 03-4108 3422; www.zoonegaramalaysia.my; adult/child RM15/6, insect zoo and butterfly park adult/child RM5/3; 9am-5pm), 13km northeast of KL in **Hulu Klang**, is home to a wide variety of native wildlife, including tigers, as well as other animals from Asia and Africa. Although some of the enclosures could definitely be bigger, it is one of Asia's better zoos.

You can buy bags of carrot chips and bunches of green bamboo to feed the elephants, camels, deer and giraffes yourself – these foodstuffs are selected to complement the animals' natural diet. It's possible to spend a day as a volunteer here – the website has details for arranging this.

Taxis charge around RM30 from central KL or you can take Metrobus 16 or KL Rapid U23 (RM3) from Medan Pasar.

In the sleepy village of **Gombak**, 25km north of KL, the **Orang Asli Museum** (6189 2113; www.jheoa.gov.my/web/guest/25; 9am-5pm Sat-Thu) is a fine introduction to the customs and culture of Malaysia's indigenous people. The fascinating exhibits include clothes made from the bark of terap and ipoh trees, personal adornments, musical instruments and hunting implements, all accompanied by informative descriptions of

the various Orang Asli cultures and ways of life. The helpful staff will play video documentaries on the Orang Asli, if you ask.

The museum's shop sells the striking wood carvings of the Hma' Meri people who live on Pulau Carey, as well as *tongkat ali*, a kind of ginseng that's marketed as Malaysian Viagra.

Bus U12 (RM3, 1½ hours) from Medan Pasar in KL runs here.

Genting Highlands

This hill station, 50km north of KL on the Pahang border, is in stark contrast to the old English style of other Malaysian upland resorts, its raison d'être being **Resort World Genting** (☎2718 1888; www.rwgenting.com); this glitzy casino is the only one in the country. In its slender favour is its cool weather; at 2000m above sea level there's no need for air-conditioning. The 3.4km-long **Genting Skyway** (one-way RM6; ☎7.30am-11pm Mon-Thu, 7.30am-midnight Fri-Sun) is a gentle 11-minute cable-car glide above the dense rainforest. Kids will also enjoy the **indoor and outdoor theme parks** (outdoor park adult/child from RM50/35; indoor park RM30/28, both parks RM66/45); they include water slides, thrill rides, a climbing wall and a fierce wind tunnel for a simulated skydive.

Sleeping & Eating

Genting is an easy day trip from KL, but if you do decide to stay, the resort has a choice

of five hotels (sleeping a total of 10,000 people). Rates vary enormously, the most expensive nights generally being Saturday and all public holidays; check on the website or with the KL **booking office** (☎2718 1118; 28 Jln Sultan Ismail, Wisma Genting; ☎8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat). There's no shortage of places to eat, including cheap fast-food outlets and noisy food courts.

First World Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(r from RM150; @☎) With 6500 beds, this is Malaysia's largest hotel, with plain but quite acceptable rooms.

Maxims Genting

HOTEL \$\$\$

(r from RM550; @☎☎) Genting's most luxurious digs, designed to pamper high rollers.

Getting There & Away

Buses leave at hourly (and sometimes half-hourly) intervals from 7.30am to 8.30pm from KL's Pudu Sentral bus station (adult/child RM8.50/6.80, 1½ hours), and on the hour from 8am to 7pm from KL Sentral (RM8.30/6.70); the price includes the Skyway cable car. A taxi from KL will cost around RM70.

The **Go Genting Golden Package** (RM58) includes return transport from KL, the Skyway transfer and either an Outdoor Theme Park ride pass or buffet lunch at the Coffee Terrace. Buy the pass from Genting's ticket office at KL Sentral or from its **main sales office** (☎2718 1118; www.rwgenting.com; 28 Jln Sultan Ismail, Wisma Genting; ☎8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat), where you can also book resort accommodation.

WORTH A TRIP

KUALA KUBU BHARU

Most travellers zip through Kuala Kubu Bharu, 72km north of KL, en route to Fraser's Hill. However, the charming, stuck-in-time town known as KKB is the jumping off point for various adventurous outdoor activities such as rafting and kayaking on the Selangor Dam, Sungai Selangor and Sungai Chiling. A recommended outfitter is **Pierose Swift-water** (www.raftmalaysia.com).

A popular jungle trek is to the 20m-tall **Chiling Waterfall** on Sungai Chiling. This is a 1½ hour walk from the so-called Rainbow Bridge on route 55 leading up to Fraser's Hill. The route is clearly marked, but it's a good idea to hire a guide since you have to cross the river five times and it's important to be aware of flash flooding. **Happy Yen** (☎017-369 7831; www.happyyen.com; tour R250 per person) organises tours to the falls from KL.

KKB is connected to KL by the KTM Komuter train (RM5.60); you'll need to change at Rawang. From the station a taxi to the town centre costs around RM5. Accommodation in KKB is limited to basic hotels. Better to use Fraser's Hill as a base, or the rough-luxe **Sekeping Serendah Retreat** (☎012-324 6552; www.serendah.com; cabins from RM500/650; ☎), self-catering cabins in the rainforest near Serendah, 35km south of KKB and also on the train line.

Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser)

📍09

Of all the hill stations, Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser), around 100km north of KL, retains the most colonial charm and attracts a fraction of the visitors of Genting or the Cameron Highlands. Situated across seven densely forested hills at a cool altitude of 1524m, this quiet and relatively undeveloped place is best visited for gentle hikes and bird-watching.

Fraser's Hill is named after Louis James Fraser, an adventurous Scotsman who migrated to Malaysia in the 1890s. Trying his luck in the country's booming tin-mining industry, Fraser set up a mule-train operation to transport the ore across the hills and is also rumoured to have run gambling and opium dens. These had vanished (along with Fraser himself) by 1917, when Bishop Ferguson-Davie of Singapore came looking for Fraser. Recognising the area's potential as a hill station, the bishop wrote a report to the High Commissioner on his return to Singapore. A couple of years later this 'little England' in the heart of the Malaysian jungle began to be developed.

Like the Genting Highlands, Fraser's Hill is on the Selangor-Pahang border, but almost all visitors come through Selangor, and the state border actually cuts right through the station. For more information see www.fraserhill.info.

👁 Sights & Activities

Fraser's Hill's main attraction is its abundant flora and fauna, in particular its birdlife. Some 265 species of birds have been spotted here, including the Malaysian whistling thrush, the Kinabalu friendly warbler, the brilliantly coloured green magpie, and the long-tailed broadbill with its sky-blue chest. In June the hill station hosts its International Bird Race, in which teams of bird-watchers compete to record the highest number of species. In the sports centre opposite the Puncak Inn, there's a Bird Interpretation Centre at the **golf clubhouse** (Map p103); get the key from the staff at the Puncak Inn.

Pick up a leaflet from the Puncak Inn outlining various hikes, most pretty straightforward and signposted. You'll need to arrange a guide for the 5km-long Pine Tree Trail, which takes around six hours and crosses three mountain peaks, including 1505m

Pine Tree Hill; a recommended guide is **Mr Durai** (📞013-983 1633; durefh@hotmail.com), who charges around RM30 per hour.

Opposite the Puncak Inn is the picturesque nine-hole **golf course** (Map p103; 📞362 2129; Jln Genting; green fees Mon-Fri/Sat & Sun RM30/40, hire of half/full set of clubs RM15/30); guests at the Puncak and Shahzan Inns receive a 20% discount. At the **paddock** (Map p103) to the east of the golf course, you can go horse riding (RM5 to RM8) or practise archery (RM8). Alternatively hire a paddleboat (RM6 per 15 minutes) to explore Allan's Waters, a small lake next to the flower nursery.

About 4km northwest of the town centre, along Jln Air Terjun, is **Jeriau Waterfall**, where you can also swim. It's a 20-minute climb up from the road to reach them.

🛏 Sleeping

There's plenty of accommodation but musty, damp rooms and cottages go with the territory. Many places charge 20% to 40% more on weekends and public holidays when you will need to book ahead. Rates typically include breakfast.

Ye Olde Smokehouse **Fraser's Hill**

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p103; 📞362 2226; www.thesmokehouse.my; Jln Jeriau; d/stg from RM308/385) Exposed beams, log fires, four-poster beds and chintz – the Smokehouse goes for broke with its English-charm offensive. Even if you don't stay here, drop by for a well-made pie or roast at lunch or afternoon tea (from RM18) on the **garden terrace**.

Highland Resthouse **Holdings Bungalows**

BUNGALOW \$\$

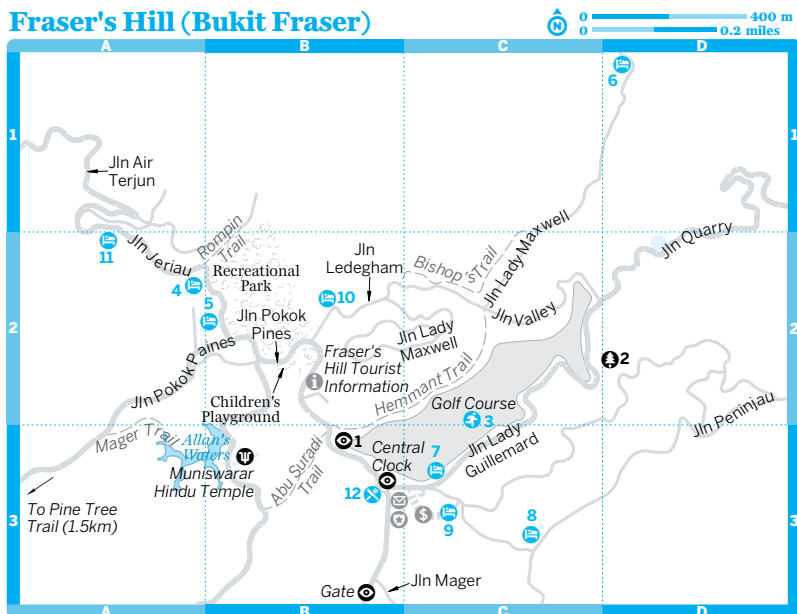
(📍in KL 09-362 2645; www.hrbhungalows.com; 📞) Check the website of this company for details about the range of rooms and bungalows at Fraser's Hill, starting from RM180 per room at the eight-bedroom Pekan bungalow, a well-kept property overlooking the golf course, to RM2000 for full hire of the four-bedroom **Jerantut bungalow** (Map p103). Its other properties include the **Brinchang** (Map p103), **Jelai** (Map p103), **Raub** (Map p103), **Pekan** (Map p103) and **Temerloh** (Map p103) bungalows.

Puncak Inn

HOTEL \$\$\$

(📞09-3622 007; puncakinn1@yahoo.com; r with breakfast RM100, apt/bungalow RM120/300) Newly renovated Puncak has the best-value rooms in Fraser's in a handy central location.

Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser)



Fraser's Hill (Bukit Fraser)

📍 Sights

- 1 Golf Clubhouse B3
- 2 Paddock (Horse Riding, Archery) D2

🏃 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 3 Golf Course C2

🛏 Sleeping

- 4 Brinchang Bungalow A2
- 5 Jelai Bungalow B2

- 6 Jerantut Bungalow D1
- 7 Pekan Bungalow C3
- 8 Raub Bungalow C3
- 9 Shahzan Inn Fraser's Hill C3
- 10 Temerloh Bungalow B2
- 11 Ye Olde Smokehouse Fraser's Hill A2

🍴 Eating

- 12 Hill View B3

It also rents out studio, two- and three-bed apartments in the Fraser's Silverpark Resort, and four cottages, sleeping between four and 15 people.

Shahzan Inn Fraser's Hill

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p103; ☎362 3300; shahzan7@streamyx.com; Jln Lady Guillemard; garden/golf course view r incl breakfast from RM150/174; 🍽) One of the most attractive places to stay. All rooms have balconies, a kettle and satellite TV; the ones overlooking the golf course are the nicest.



Eating

There a couple of small stores as you come into Fraser's Hill for self-catering supplies as well as a hawker stall complex beside the

kids' playground. All the hotels have restaurants, Ye Olde Smokehouse's being the best.

Hill View

WESTERN, CHINESE \$

(Map p103; Hawker's Stalls, Pine Tree Rd; mains from RM10; ☎9.30am-9pm) Simple dishes are cooked up by a family who have run this stall for a couple of generations.



Information

Fraser's Hill Tourist Information (FHDC;

☎362 2207; www.pkbf.org.my; Puncak Inn, Jln Genting; ☎8am-5pm Mon-Fri) The front desk provides information, maps and brochures; staff can help arrange hiking guides.

Maybank (Shahzan Inn, Jln Lady Guillemard;

☎9.15am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 9.15am-4pm Fri)

Has ATM, accepts credit cards, exchanges foreign currency and travellers cheques.

Getting There & Away

The route to Fraser's Hill is via Kuala Kubu Bharu (KKB, p101). A taxi from KKB to Fraser's Hill is one-way/return including waiting RM80/200, or from KL's Pudu Sentral bus station R150/300.

If driving yourself, note there's no petrol station in Fraser's Hill; the nearest ones are at Raub and KKB.

Putrajaya

 03 / POP 68,000


An eye-catching array of monumental architecture amid lush, manicured greenery is on display in **Putrajaya** (www.ppj.gov.my), 25km south of KL and 20km north of KLIA. Covering 4932 hectares of former rubber and palm-oil plantations, the Federal Government's administrative hub was but a twinkle in the eye of its principal visionary – former prime minister Dr Mahathir – back in the early 1990s.


As a showcase of urban planning and vaulting architectural ambition, Putrajaya is impressive, but it can also be a strange place to visit. Its heart is a 600-hectare artificial lake fringed by landscaped parks and an eclectic mix of buildings and bridges, best viewed when illuminated at night. However, it's still a long way off its envisioned population of over 300,000 – this sprawling city is practically devoid of streetlife. Just over 97% of Putrajaya's population is Muslim.

Sights & Activities

Urban Putrajaya

NEIGHBOURHOOD

(Putra Mosque for non-Muslims 9am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Sat-Thu, 3-6pm Fri) Monumental buildings, each a different design, line the main boulevard Persiaran Perdana, which runs from the elevated spaceship-like **Putrajaya Convention Centre** ( 8887 6000; Presint 5), worth visiting for the views, to the circular **Dataran Putra** (Putra Square). Look out for the Mughal-esque **Istana Kehakiman** (Palace of Justice), the modernist Islamic gateway fronting the **Kompleks Perdanan Putrajaya** (Putrajaya Corporation Complex) and steel-clad **Tuan Ku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque**.



Framing Dataran Putra on two sides are **Perdana Putra**, housing the offices of the prime minister, and the handsome **Putra Mosque** ( for non-Muslims 9am-12.30pm, 2-4pm

& 5.30-6pm Sat-Thu, 3-4pm & 5.30-6pm Fri), which has space for 15,000 worshippers and an ornate pink-and-white-patterned dome, influenced by Safavid architecture from Iran. Appropriately dressed non-Muslim visitors are welcome outside prayer times.

There are nine bridges, all in different styles. The longest, at 435m, is the **Putra Bridge**, which mimics the Khaju Bridge in Esfahan, Iran. Also worthy of a photo is the futurist sail-like **Wawasan Bridge** connecting Presint 2 and 8.

Lake Cruise

BOAT TOUR

(adult/child RM40/26) The bridges and buildings look their best viewed from Putrajaya Lake. **Cruise Tasik Putrajaya** ( 8888 3769; www.cruisetasikputrajaya.com;  10am-6pm Mon-Thu, to 8pm Fri & Sat, to 7pm Sun), located just beneath the Dataran Putra end of the Putra Bridge, offers two main options: the gondola-like Perahu Dondang Sayang boats, which depart any time for a 30-minute trip around the lake; and a 45-minute air-con cruise on the Belimbing boat (adult/child RM50/35, leaves hourly).



Taman Botani

GARDENS

(Botanic Gardens;  8888 9090; Presint 1; admission free;  9am-noon & 2pm-5pm Sat-Thu, 9am-11am & 3-5pm Fri) North of Perdana Putra, near the prime minister's official residence, this 93-hectare site features attractive tropical gardens, a visitors centre, a beautifully tiled Moroccan pavilion and lakeside restaurant. A tourist tram (RM4) trundles between the flower beds and trestles, and you can hire bicycles (RM2 per hour).

Taman Wetland






PARK

(Wetland Park;  8887 7773; admission free;  park 7am-7pm, nature interpretation centre 9am-6pm) Further north is this serene, contemplative space with peaceful nature trails, aquatic animals and water birds, fluttering butterflies and picnic tables overlooking the lake. Canoeing and boating trips can be arranged here.

Sleeping & Eating

Putrajaya Shangri-la

HOTEL \$\$\$

( 8887 8888; www.shangri-la.com; Taman Putra Perdana, Presint 1; r from RM430;    ) This elegant, contemporary styled hotel has large, calming rooms and a great hillside view across to the lake. Its **Azur** restaurant

serving nicely presented international food is one of Putrajaya's best.

Pullman Putrajaya Lakeside RESORT \$\$\$
(☎8890 0000; www.pullmanputrajaya.com; 2 Jln P5/5, Presint 5; r from RM417; ㊟@☎) Close to the Convention Centre, this massive resort complex offers four styles of room – Indian, Chinese, Malay and Borneo (overlooking the lake). The rooms and resort facilities are excellent and include an alfresco restaurant built over the lake.

Alamanda MALL \$
(www.alamanda.com.my; meals RM10; ☎10am–10pm) Putrajaya's swish shopping mall is home to several restaurants as well as an excellent food court where you can join the local bureaucrats for a meal.

Selera Putra FOOD COURT \$
(meals RM10; ☎9am–7pm Mon–Fri, 9am–9pm Sat & Sun) Head to this food court beneath Dataran Putra and enjoy the lakeside view while enjoying a wide range of inexpensive Malaysian dishes.

① Getting There & Away

KLIA transit trains from KL Sentral and KLIA stop at the Putrajaya-Cyberjaya station (from KL Sentral it costs RM9.50 one way and takes 20 minutes).

Buses 100, 101 and 300 run from the train station to close to Dataran Putra (50 sen); a taxi there is RM13, while hiring one for an hour to tour the sights (the recommended option) is RM40.

Bicycles (RM4 per hour) can be hired from the **tourist information booth** (☎8am–1pm, 2–5.30pm Sat–Thu, 8am–12.15pm & 2.45–5.30pm Fri) on Dataran Putra. From here and Putrajaya station, the two-hour **Best of Putrajaya bus tour** (☎03-8887 7690; RM1; ☎11.30am & 3pm Sat & Sun) runs on the weekends only.

Klang Valley

Heading southwest of KL along the Klang Hwy, the **Kota Darul Ehsan** ceremonial arch marks the transition between the city and Selangor. Just over the boundary, Petaling Jaya blends into Shah Alam, the state capital, which blends into Klang, the old royal capital – pretty much all in one seamless stretch of housing estates and industrial parks. Efficient public transport to and from KL makes for easy day trips.

PETALING JAYA

☎03

Many of the people you'll meet in KL actually live in the neighbouring city of Petaling Jaya (PJ). This sprawling community is defined by its giant shopping malls. Apart from these, there's not a whole lot else to detain you here.

👁 Sights & Activities

Sunway Lagoon & Sunway Pyramid Theme Park

AMUSEMENT PARK

There are few more fun ways to cool down than splashing around at **Sunway Lagoon** (☎5639 0000; www.sunwaylagoon.com; 3 Jln PJS, 11/11 Bandar Sunway; adult/child from RM80/65; ☎11am–6pm Mon & Wed–Fri, 10am–6pm Sat & Sun). Built on the site of a former tin mine and quarry, the highlights of this multizone theme park are the water slides, and what's claimed to be the world's largest artificial surf beach. There's also a Wild West-themed section with all the regular thrill rides, an interactive wildlife zoo (ie you're allowed to stroke the giant tortoises and cuddle the hamsters) and an extreme park with all-terrain vehicles, a rock-climbing wall and paintball fights.

The park is behind the vast **Sunway Pyramid** (☎7494 3100; www.sunwaypyramid.com; skating rink admission incl skate hire Mon–Fri

SEPANG INTERNATIONAL CIRCUIT

The **Sepang Circuit** (☎03-8778 2222; www.sepangcircuit.com), 65km south of KL and a 10-minute drive east of KLIA, is where Formula One holds the Malaysian Grand Prix every March or April. Tickets go for as little as RM100. During the three days of the race, plenty of special train and bus transport to the circuit is on offer, from around RM80 return from KL city centre.

Other car and motorcycle races are held here throughout the year – check the website for details. On nonrace days call ahead to book a tour of the facilities including a run through **auto museum** (admission free; ☎9am–6pm). Also check the website for track days when the circuit is open to wannabe Michael Schumachers to rev up their own cars (RM200) or motorbikes (below 250cc RM70, over 250cc RM100).

RM13, Sat & Sun RM16; 🏊 skating rink 9am-8pm) mall, distinguished by its giant lion gateway, faux Egyptian walls and crowning pyramid. Inside is a **skating rink** as well as a bowling alley, a multiplex cinema and the usual plethora of shops and dining outlets.

The easiest way here is take the Putra LRT to Kelana Jaya (RM2.10), then feeder bus T623 (RM1) or a taxi (RM15) to the Sunway Pyramid. Buses U63, U67 and U76 (RM3) run here from Pasir Seni in KL. A taxi from central KL will cost around RM25.

SHAH ALAM

📍03

Selangor's state capital, which started to be built in the 1970s, has a well-developed infrastructure, huge public buildings and a rapidly growing population. It's a staunchly Muslim city, dominated by its mosque, one of the largest in Southeast Asia.

👁 Sights

Masjid Sultan Salahuddin

Abdul Aziz Shah

MOSQUE

(📍5159 9988; 🕒10am-noon & 2-4pm Sat-Thu) Called the Blue Mosque for its azure dome (larger than that of London's St Paul's Cathedral), this mammoth complex is covered in a rosette of verses from the Quran and accommodates up to 24,000 worshippers. Its four minarets, looking like giant rockets, are the tallest in the world (over 140m). You'll need to be appropriately dressed if you want to look inside.

City of Digital Lights

at i-City

TECHNOLOGY PARK

(www.i-city.my; per car RM10; 🕒6pm-3am) Some bright spark had the idea to jolly up this otherwise dull technology park with a million and one LED light displays. As well as forests of multicoloured trees, giant peacocks and cacti, there's Snowwalk, a giant walk through a refrigerator housing ice sculptures. Kids and collectors of supremely kitsch experiences will love it.

📍 Getting There & Away

From Pasar Seni in KL, frequent buses include U80, U65, U64 and U81 to Shah Alam (RM3)

KLANG & PELABUHAN KLANG

📍03

About 10km west of Shah Alam is Klang, once Selangor's royal capital. This is where the British installed their first Resident in 1874. Its few sights should take no more than a couple of hours to see, leaving you plenty of time to enjoy the real reason for heading

here: satisfying your stomach in the restaurants of Klang's vibrant Little India.

Five stops further down the line the KTM Komuter trains terminate at Pelabuhan Klang, once KL's main seaport until the establishment of the modern harbour on Pulau Indah, 17km to the southwest. The main reason for coming here is to either catch a ferry to Sumatra or Pulau Ketam.

👁 Sights

Klang is small enough to see on foot. Heading south from the train station, along Jalan Stesyen, you'll pass several attractive rows of Chinese shophouses (to the right).

Little India

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Running parallel to Jln Stesyen to the right is Jln Tengku Kelana, heart of Klang's colourful **Little India**. Especially frenetic around the Hindu festival of Deepavali, this Little India is more vibrant than that of KL and includes several fortune tellers, who squat on the pavement and predict the future with the aid of green parrots trained to pick out auspicious cards.

FREE Galeri Diraja Sultan

Abdul Aziz

MUSEUM

(📍3373 6500; www.galeridiraja.com; Jln Stesyen; 🕒10am-5pm Tue-Sun) A grand whitewashed 1909 colonial building houses the royal gallery, devoted to the history of the Selangor Sultanate (dating back to 1766), contains a wide array of royal regalia, gifts and artifacts, including replicas of the crown jewels.

Istana Alam Shah

PALACE

(Jln Istana) Heading uphill along Jln Istana will bring you to the sultan's palace before the capital was moved to Shah Alam. The park opposite gives a pleasant view of the city.

Masjid Di Raja Sultan Suleiman

MOSQUE

(Jln Kota Raja) East of the palace, along Jln Kota Raja, this former state mosque, opened in 1934, is a striking blend of art deco and Middle Eastern influences. Several sultans are buried here. Step inside to admire its stained-glass dome.

🍴 Eating

Indian food is Klang's highlight, but it's not the only thing on offer: the town's Chinese community is also famous for inventing *bak kut* (pork-rib soup with hints of garlic and Chinese five spice).

ISLAND ESCAPES

If you're looking to escape the Klang Valley's urban sprawl, two islands – one reached by ferry, the other by road – make for off-beat day trips.

Chill out on the 30-minute ferry trip (return R14) through the mangroves from Pelabuhan Klang to **Pulau Ketam** (Crab Island), where you'll find a charming fishing village built on stilts over the mudflats. There's little to do here other than wander around the wooden buildings of the village and enjoy a Chinese seafood lunch at one of several restaurants. Air-con ferries depart roughly every hour starting from 8.45am; the last ferry back from Pulau Ketam is at 5.30pm (6pm on weekends).

If you don't have your own wheels, hire a taxi to get you out to **Pulau Carey** (from Klang one way/return RM80/150), an island largely covered with palm-oil plantations. Tiny **Kampung Sungai Bumbon** is home to an Orang Asli tribe known as the Hma' Meri (also written as Mah Meri). Here you can see the woodcarvers who have put the Mah Meri's art on the cultural map. There's also a **community centre** (☎9am-5pm), where you can pick up pretty woven baskets and other products made from dyed pandanus palm leaves as well as an interesting booklet in English about Hma' Meri culture.

**Mohana Bistro**

INDIAN \$\$

(☎3372 7659; 119 Jln Tengku Kelana; meals RM10-16; ☎7am-10.30pm; ♿) Deservedly popular spot for banana-leaf curry spreads and spice-laden biryani rice. The waiters bring round trays of tempting veg and meat dishes to choose from.

Seng Huat Bak Kut Teh

MALAY, CHINESE \$

(☎012-309 8303; 9 Jln Besar; meal RM10; ☎7.30am-1pm & 5.30-8.30pm; ♿) Sample the fragrant, flavoursome pork stew at this unpretentious eatery, steps away from the train station, just beneath the Klang Bridge – get here early though as it's popular and they run out of meat towards the end of their opening sessions.

Asoka

INDIAN \$

(105 Jln Tengku Kelana; meals RM5-10; ☎7am-11pm) Vividly orange-and-cream-painted parlour of Indian culinary goodness, including a great selection of sweets, juices and crispy *dosai* pancakes served with coconut chutney.

Sri Barathan Matha Vilas

INDIAN, CHINESE \$

(34-36 Jln Tengku Kelana; meals RM5-10; ☎6.30am-10.30pm) It's hard to resist a bowl of this restaurant's signature dish of spicy mee goreng (fried noodles); the chef prepares them constantly in a giant wok beside the entrance.

Getting There & Away**KLANG**

It's best to come here by train from KL (RM3.60, 1 hour, every 30 minutes), as the KTM Komuter

station is closer to the sights. Klang's bus station is opposite the My Din shopping complex, on the northern side of the river. There are several buses every hour to central KL (RM3) or Kuala Selangor (RM5).

PELABUHAN KLANG

KTM Komuter trains run to/from KL and Klang, and the station is just a stone's throw from the ferry terminal.

Ferries to Tanjung Balai (Asahan; one way including tax RM110, 4 hours, one to three daily) and Dumai (RM110, 3½ hours, one daily) in Sumatra depart from here. Citizens of Australia, America, Britain and several European nations can get a visa on arrival in Indonesia; otherwise you must have an Indonesian visa before boarding. To check on ferry times call the **terminal** (☎3167 7186, 3165 2545).

Kuala Selangor

☎03

Where the Sungai Selangor flows into the sea is the old royal capital of Kuala Selangor. The hilltop fort at this small sleepy town was briefly conquered by the Dutch when they invaded Selangor in 1784; Sultan Ibrahim took it back a year later. The town became embroiled in the Selangor Civil War (1867-73) when the fort was partly destroyed. Later the British built a lighthouse on the hill, which still stands.

Off the beaten tourist track, Kuala Selangor has a friendly *kampung* (village) atmosphere and a good wildlife park. It's possible to do as a day trip from KL, but an overnight

stop is recommended so you can catch the nightly show put on by fireflies along the Sungai Selangor.

Sights & Activities

Kampung Kuantan

FIREFLY VIEWING

The best place from which to see the fireflies this region is famed for is the tiny village of Kampung Kuantan, 9km east of Kuala Selangor. Malay-style wooden boats row out on the river to the 'show trees' and their dazzling displays. Boats take four people at RM15 each for the 20-minute trip, and leave on demand throughout the evening from around 7pm until 10pm. The trips are not recommended on full-moon or rainy nights, when the fireflies are not at their luminous best. Take mosquito repellent.

To reach the village, take the turn-off to Batang Berjuntai, 2km south of Kuala Selangor. A taxi from Kuala Selangor costs RM40 return. You can also see the fireflies at the Firefly Park Resort (p108) at Kampung Bukit Belimbing.

Bukit Malawati

VIEWPOINT

It's a pleasant, short walk through landscaped parklands to the top of Bukit Malawati, featuring views across the mangrove coastline. The hill has long been an ideal site for monitoring shipping in the Selat Melaka (Strait of Melaka), first for the sultans of Selangor and then for the Dutch, who destroyed the sultan's fort during their invasion in 1784, then rebuilt it, naming it Fort Atlingsburg after their governor general.

All that remains today are some sections of the fort's wall and a few cannons. At the summit you'll find the British lighthouse (dating from 1909) and a podium for viewing the new moon. Tame silvered leaf monkeys hang out here, too.

The road up Bukit Malawati starts one block away from the old bus station in the town centre. It does a clockwise loop of the hill; you can walk up and around in less than an hour.



Taman Alam Kuala Selangor Nature Park

WILDLIFE RESERVE

(☎3289 2294; www.mns.org.my; Jln Klinik; adult/child RM4/1; ☀8am-6pm) On the estuary of Sungai Selangor, at the foot of Bukit Malawati and reached by a flight of steps from the hill, is this 240-hectare park containing three ecosystems: secondary forest, a man-made lake and a mangrove forest with views out to sea. Explore them all on a 3km trail

that includes a raised walkway above the mangroves.



Sleeping



De Palma Hotel

Kuala Selangor

HOTEL \$\$

(☎3289 7070; www.depalmahotel.com; Jln Tanjung Keramat; r with breakfast from RM200; ☎@☎☎) Around 1.5km north of the old bus station (follow the signs) is this decent mini-resort offering a range of accommodation in nicely furnished and reasonably well-maintained wooden chalets. It rents bicycles (RM5 an hour) and can arrange a trip out to see the fireflies (RM66). The best deal is their two-day, one-night packages (RM140 per person), which include accommodation and the fireflies trip.

Firefly Park Resort

HOTEL \$\$

(☎3260 1208; www.fireflypark.com; Jln Haji Omar; chalets from RM130; ☎) This modern resort has plainly decorated, comfortable four-person chalets perched on stilts over the river, and pleasant landscaped grounds. Boat trips to watch the fireflies cost RM15/10 for adults/children, and fishing trips cost RM40 per hour.

Taman Alam Kuala

Selangor Nature Park

HUTS, CHALET \$

(☎3289 2294; www.mns.org.my; Jln Klinik; r from RM30) Offers simple A-frame huts (RM30) or two-bed (one single, one queen) wooden chalets (RM60) with fan and attached bathroom.



Eating

If seafood is what you're after, head to Pasir Penambang, a fishing village on the north side of the river, where a number of atmospheric seafood restaurants are clustered; a taxi from Kuala Selangor costs around RM10.

Auntie Kopitiam

CHINESE, MALAY \$

(No C3, Jln Sultan Ibrahim; meals RM5-10; ☀6am-6pm; ☎) Next to the bus station, this old-style coffee shop serves Malaysian favourites such as *nasi lemak* and chicken chop.



Getting There & Away

Frequent buses from Klang head to Kuala Selangor (RM5, one hour, every 15 minutes) terminating at the old bus station beside Bukit Malawati. From the new bus station, 2km outside the town centre, bus 149 connects with KL (RM7.50, 2 hours, every hour).

Approximate fares for a taxi ride from Kuala Selangor: KL (RM100), Klang (RM60) and Teluk Intan (RM130) in Perak.

NEGERI SEMBILAN

Seremban

206 / POP 550,000

Like KL, Seremban's roots lay in the discovery of tin in the 19th century causing prospectors to flock to the village originally called Sungai Ujong. Today Negeri Sembilan's state capital, 64km southeast of KL, is a much more low key place, generally overlooked by international visitors but worth visiting for its lovely gardens, interesting mix of architecture and the chance to eat some tasty local specialities. It's also the transit point for other destinations in Negeri Sembilan, including the beachside resorts of Port Dickson.

The Muzium Negeri, a component of the Taman Seni Budaya Negeri on the outskirts of town, provides an access point to Minangkabau culture. The city itself is home mostly to Chinese and Indian populations.

Sights

Lake Gardens & Colonial District

NEIGHBOURHOOD

(Map p110) The lake dominates this lush reserve that's a very pleasant stroll just east of the train station. To the south east is the **King George V School** (Map p110; Jln Za'aba), the premier colonial academic institution for Seremban's elite; it still functions as a high school. To the north east is the striking **Masjid Negeri** (State Mosque; Map p110; Jln

Dato Hamzah); its nine external pillars represent the nine original fiefdoms of Negeri Sembilan.

A short walk north of the mosque is **Kompleks Kraf Negeri Sembilan** (Map p110; 767 1388; cnr Jln Bukit & Jln Sehala; 9am-5pm), in a handsome 1912 mansion that was once home to British Resident Captain Murray. Inside is an exhibit on local crafts, including rattan weaving and ceramics, and a shop – you'll likely have the place to yourself. From the same colonial era is the even grander neoclassical **State Library** (Map p110; off Jln Dato Hamzah), designed by AB Hubback, the architect responsible for many of KL's historic buildings.

Across the road is the **Istana Besar** (Map p110; Jln Bukit; closed to the public), home of the sultan of Negeri Sembilan, and the **Wisma Negeri** (Map p110; btwn Jln Dato Abdul Kadir & Jln Dato Abdul Malek), part of the State Secretariat complex, its wonderful multiple roof-points a fine melding of modern and traditional architecture.

FREE Muzium Negeri

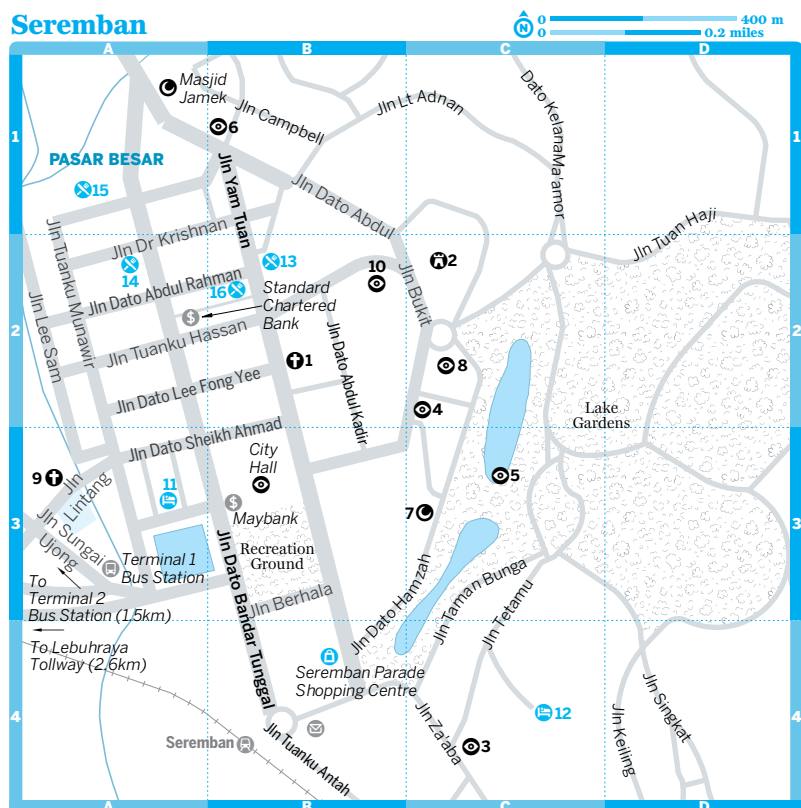
MUSEUM

(State Museum; Jln Sungai Ujong; admission free; 10am-6pm Tue, Wed, Sat & Sun, 8.15am-1pm Thu, 10am-12.15pm & 2.45-6pm Fri) Built in the style of a Minangkabau palace, this mildly diverting museum displays handicrafts and historical exhibits. You'll find it inside the park **Taman Seni Budaya Negeri**, (Arts & Cultural Park; Jln Sungai Ujong; admission free) along with two original pieces of architecture transported and reconstructed here from elsewhere in the state: the timber **Ampang Tinggi Palace**, dating from 1870, and the **Rumah Negeri Sembilan**, a less ornate traditional house with a shingle roof showing

THE MINANGKABAU

Hailing originally from Western Sumatra, the **Minangkabau** people have lived in Peninsula Malaysia since at least the 15th century settling, primarily in the region now covered by Negeri Sembilan. Following Islam but also incorporating older animist beliefs and traditional customs (known as *adat*) into their daily lives, they have long since blended in with the Malay population. However, aspects of Minangkabau culture remain. The most noticeable feature is the distinct **traditional architecture** of the region: homes with sweeping curved roofs and pointed gables that are supposed to resemble buffalo horns. Good examples of this architectural style can be seen in Seremban's Taman Seni Budaya Negeri and the old royal town of Seri Menanti. The village of **Tera-
chi**, 27km east of Seremban at the turn-off to Sri Menanti, also has some particularly fine traditional houses, although all have replaced the traditional thatch of the roofs with more durable corrugated iron.

Seremban



Seremban

📍 Sights

- 1 Church of the Visitation B2
- 2 Istana Besar C2
- 3 King George V School C4
- 4 Kompleks Kraf Negeri Sembilan C2
- 5 Lake Gardens & Colonial District C3
- 6 Liesheng Temple B1
- 7 Masjid Negeri C3
- 8 State Library C2
- 9 Wesley Church A3
- 10 Wisma Negeri B2

🏨 Sleeping

- 11 Carlton Star Hotel A3
- 12 Royale Bintang Resort & Spa
Seremban C4

🍜 Eating

- 13 Haji Shariff's Cendol B2
- 14 Kee Mei Siew Pao A2
- 15 Sin Yee Kee A1
- 16 Top Curry B2

the hallmark curved-roof style based on the buffalo horn. The park is located 3km west of the city centre close to the E2 North-South expressway; a taxi here is around R5.

Liesheng Temple

TEMPLE

(Map p110; Jln Dr Samuel; ☉daylight hr) This small, attractive Taoist temple has a roof decorated with dragons, and a fine carving of a boat hanging above the door. The main altar is dedicated to three Taoist idols, chief

among which is Guandi (the God of War). The Chinese characters above the altar mean 'Your needs will be answered'.

Church of the Visitation

CHURCH

(Map p110; 85a Jln Yam Tuan) Flee from the heat into the cool, white interior of this Catholic church, dating from 1899 and so called because it was where French priests would break their journey between KL and Malaka to receive the locals' confession.

Wesley Church

CHURCH

(Map p110; Jln Dato Sheikh Ahmad) Founded in 1915 to cater to the Christian Chinese migrants who flooded into the area following the discovery of tin. The similar era Anglo-Chinese School (SMK Methodist) shares the church's compound.

Sleeping

Seremban lacks any truly distinctive accommodation. You're better off staying in KL and visiting for day; alternatively both Port Dickson and Melaka are only about an hour away by road.

Royale Bintang Resort & Spa Seremban

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p110; ☎766 6666; www.royalebintang-sere-mban.com; Jln Dato AS Dawood; r from RM290; 🏠🚗) Seremban's top hotel has comfortable, well-maintained rooms, a good range of restaurants and amenities (swimming pool with landscaped waterfalls, fitness centre, a jogging track to the nearby lake gardens and more) and helpful staff.

Carlton Star Hotel

HOTEL \$

(Map p110; ☎762 5336; www.carltonstar.com; 47 Jln Dato Sheikh Ahmad; s or d/tr/q RM75/95/115; 🏠🚗) Within walking distance of Terminal 1 bus station and the train station, this hotel has boring but big business-style rooms. The staff are friendly.

Eating

The best reason for visiting Seremban is to eat. Apart from the famous *cendol* (a pandan-leaf flavoured desert served with shaved ice, red beans, jaggery syrup and coconut milk) and beef noodle stalls that we review, also search out Minangkabau-style dishes, such as *masak lemak* (fish, meat or vegetables cooked in coconut milk), *rendang* (a thick, dry meat curry usually served with rice cooked in coconut milk) and *dendeng*

balado (beef with chilli). Another thing to sample, courtesy of Seremban's Chinese community, are the local *siew pao*, delicious flaky pastry buns stuffed with either pork or chicken.



Haji Shariff's Cendol

MALAY \$

(Map p110; 44 Jln Yam Tuan; cendol/rojak from RM1.30/3; ☎10.30am-6pm, closed alternate Fridays) Three generations of the Shariff family have been doling out refreshingly sweet bowls of *cendol* to appreciative locals. Now installed in a distinctively green-painted 1919 shophouse, they also serve a local version of *rojak* with a spicy tomato rather than soy sauce.



Sin Yee Kee

CHINESE \$

(Map p110; Stall 742, Upper floor, Pasar Besar Seremban, Jln Dato Bandar Tunggal; noodles RM6; ☎Fri-Wed 7.30am-3pm) There's a good selection of hawker stalls at the day-time food court above Seremban's food market. This family-run beef noodle stall, that's been going since the 1960s, is the standout star for its friendly service and tasty product – they make their own fat Hainanese-style noodles from rice flour. Tell them whether you want tripe with your chunks of meat or not.

Top Curry

INDIAN \$

(Map p110; ☎767 2294; btwn Jln Tuanku Hassan & Jln Dato Abdul Rahman; banana-leaf meals RM6.50) This cavernous cafe serves excellent southern Indian curries. We defy you to resist ordering the fried fish or chicken you can see being made in a wok on the footpath outside.

Kee Mei Siew Pao

MALAY \$

(Map p110; cnr Jln Dr Krishnan & Jln Dato Bandar Tunggal; pao RM1.30; ☎8am-6pm) This take-away shop is the place to pick up some of Seremban's famous *pao* (steamed pork buns), as well as other tasty baked buns and tarts.

Getting There & Away

Seremban lies on the main north-south rail line from KL to Singapore. KTM Komuter trains (RM6, one hour 15 minutes, every 30 minutes) shuttle between KL Sentral and Seremban.

Long-distance buses leave from Terminal 1 bus station on Jln Sungai Ujong; departures include:

PLACE	PRICE	DURATION	FREQUENCY
KL	RM6	one hour	every 20 minutes
Singapore	RM45	five hours	one daily
Melaka	RM7	1½ hours	hourly
Kampung-Kuantan	RM22	six hours	one daily
Kuala Pilah	RM3.40	one hour	every 15 minutes
Kuala Terengganu	RM40	six hours	one daily
Port Dickson	RM4	one hour	every 20 minutes

Some long distance buses stop at Terminal 2 about 1.5km from town centre – free shuttle buses run from here to Terminal 1.

Long-distance taxis operate from outside both the train station and Terminal 1 bus station; one-way fares include Port Dickson (RM45), Kuala Pilah (RM45), Seri Menanti (RM40), KLIA (RM70), LCCT (RM60), KL (RM80).

To reach Seremban from KLIA, first take a bus from the airport to Nilai (RM3) and change to a KTM Komuter train to Seremban (RM2.50).

Sri Menanti

☎06

Tidy and placid Sri Menanti, 6km off the Seremban–Kuala Pilah road, is the old royal capital, first settled over 400 years ago by Minangkabau immigrants from Sumatra. Swathed in a silence only interrupted by bird song, this sleepy, disengaged hamlet nestles in a highland valley surrounded by green jungle hills, fringed with simple dwellings and scampering chickens.

Beside the Sri Menanti Resort is the magnificent **Istana Lama** (Old Palace; admission free; ☎10am–6pm). Designed by master craftsmen, the beautiful black hardwood palace is open to the public as a museum. Arranged over four floors, the palace was fashioned without the use of nails in 1908 as a temporary replacement for an even older palace that was razed by British soldiers during the Sungai Ujong wars. The structure is elevated on 99 pillars, many of them carved, each one representing the legendary 99 *luak* (clan) warriors. Inside you can see the king and queen's bedchambers, the children's playroom, a large dining room and huge dining table, as well as kris weaponry and royal regalia. Climb to the top floor for views over the gardens.

Back towards the main road in the compound next to the mosque is the **Makam Di Raja** (Royal Cemetery), which has a distinctive Victorian/Moorish pavilion. The prominent grave of Tuanku Abdul Rahman, the first king of independent Malaysia, is immediately inside the gates.

The attractive **Sri Menanti Resort** (☎497 0049; r/chalet including breakfast RM159/212), next to Istana Lama, has reasonably well-maintained and surprisingly stylish rooms, including concrete chalets over an ornamental lake where you can go fishing. Nonguests can use the small swimming pool for RM5.

To reach Sri Menanti from Seremban, take a bus to Kuala Pilah (RM3.40) and then a taxi (return trip around RM30); a direct taxi from Seremban is R80 round-trip.

Kuala Pilah

☎06

A pleasant valley town 40km east of Seremban, Kuala Pilah is colourfully decorated with brightly painted shophouses; the one on the corner of Jln Muar opposite the bus station is a stunner.

Its few temples of note include the **Kuil Sri Kanthaswamy** (Jln Melang; ☎main prayer hall 6.30am–7pm), overflowing with colour and arrayed with deities. The **Sansheng Gong** (Sansheng Temple; Jln Dato Undang Johol) has a skilfully carved boat, from the time of Qing emperor Guangxu, hanging just inside the door. The fierce-looking bearded idol in the centre is Guandi (God of War). There are marvellous carvings along the front of the temple and worn frescoes on the wall. Opposite the temple is an elaborate Chinese-style decorative archway dedicated to Martin Lister, the first British Resident (1889–97) of Negeri Sembilan.

There's no reason to get stranded here, but if you do, Kuala Pilah has several cheap Chinese hotels. The **Desa Inn** (☎481 8033; 745 Jln Dato Abdul Manap; d/f RM60/81; ☎) offers clean doubles with tiled floors, air-con, small TVs, kettle, coffee and small balcony (but you may get woken by the sonorous 6am call to prayer).

For dinner, the lively **night market** (Jln Yam Tuan), near Desa Inn, kicks off at around 6pm daily. At this time, the air becomes palpably heavy with the fragrance of satay (from 60 sen) and a medley of Malay and Indian aromas.

There are regular buses from Seremban (RM4.30, one hour, every 15 minutes). Buses from Kuala Pilah also connect to Johor Bahru (RM25.10, five daily), Kuantan (RM22.10, daily) and KL (RM9.40, eight daily).

Port Dickson

②06

When people talk about Port Dickson (PD) they're usually referring to the long coastline studded with beaches – the actual Port Dickson is a small, uninteresting town slightly inland. The beach area is a popular spot with vacationing Malaysians and Singaporeans, but outside of weekends and holidays it's nearly deserted and is a good place to find a bargain resort and relax poolside for a few days or more. When you feel the need for activity, Cape Rachado Forest Reserve has some fabulous treks. For further information on the area see **Port Dickson's tourism website** (<http://portdickson.info>).

At the festival of **Navarathiri** (September or October), the goddess Sri Maha Mariamman is conveyed at night on a chariot procession around Port Dickson. The goddess performs a similar journey during the **Anniversary Prayers procession** (June or July).

👁 Sights & Activities

The strip of white sand that extends for some 16km along the coast is more popular for its proximity to KL than anything else, but it's pretty and a pleasant getaway. Unfortunately the water is fairly polluted from oil refineries in the vicinity.

Cape Rachado Forest Reserve

NATURE RESERVE

Port Dickson's highlight is the 80-hectare **Cape Rachado Forest Reserve** (also called the Tanjung Tuan Forest Reserve), the only remaining patch of coastal forest on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia. This jungle of towering lowland trees has secluded beaches that are ideal turtle laying grounds and is also a stopover for over 300,000 migratory birds every year. The turn-off to the reserve is near the Km 16 marker (the local bus can let you off here); head down the road for 2km to the Ilham Resort and then through the forest reserve for another kilometre to the **Tanjung Tuan lighthouse** (Rumah Api). Unfortunately the lighthouse, which was first built in 1528 by the Portuguese and

is the oldest in Malaysia, isn't open to the public. You can, however, walk around to the front of it for great views; on a clear day you can see Sumatra, 38km away across Selat Melaka. A simple network of trails heads into the forest from around the lighthouse and from the road towards the lighthouse to a handful of beaches (bring lots of water – it's a steep climb).

Avillion Admiral Cove

HOTEL, SPORTS

(②647 0888; www.avillionadmiralcove.com; Km 8, Jln Pantai; r from RM209) At this vaguely Mexican hacienda-style hotel, apartment and marina complex there's a wide range of activities on offer. **Yacht cruises** (RM157; 2 hours; minimum two people) leave at 9am or 5.30pm and there are various other ways of getting on the water from **jet skis** (RM200 for 30 minutes) to **kayaks** (RM20 for 1 hour). If you prefer to stay on land, **bicycles and tandems** (RM16 for 30 minutes) can be hired or you can take aim on the **archery range** (RM5 for 10 arrows). The hotel itself has large, reasonably designed rooms but isn't a patch on Avillion Port Dickson (p113), its sister property up the coast.

Port Dickson Ostrich Farm

FARM

(②06 662 7496; 13 Jln Kemang, Km 14.5; adult/child RM10/6; ☀9am-5.30pm) You can ride an ostrich or watch them race (1pm to 3pm on weekends only), where the birds reach speeds of up to 70kph. Small ones will get some fun from the mini-farm teeming with goats, peacocks, horses, donkeys, rabbits and chickens.

Sleeping

Unless mentioned all rates include breakfast. Also rates rise significantly on Friday, Saturday and public holidays.

Avillion Port Dickson

RESORT \$\$\$

(②647 6688; www.avillionportdickson.com; Jln Pantai, Km 5; r from RM406; 🏠🍷🌊) This is a beautifully designed and lushly landscaped resort. The accommodation highlight is the over-the-water chalets that have big terraces you can swim from at high tide. The cheapest rooms are classier than just about anywhere else, with their hardwood floors, elegant wood furnishings, flagstone bathrooms and loads of natural light. Also at hand are several good restaurants, a huge pool with slides, a tennis court and a gym.

IN RAPTURE OF RAPTORS

Around mid-February to mid-April, migrating raptors (birds of prey such as kestrels, falcons and eagles) make the crossing from Sumatra to the Asian continent via the Cape Rachado Forest Reserve. Some 25 species head north for the summer each year and, having used up most of their energy getting across the Straits of Melaka, are tired and fly so low that you can see them stunningly close-up. The birds that arrive late in the afternoon or evening often rest and recuperate at the reserve for the night before heading off again on their long journeys. Without this precious forested rest area, naturalists say that many of the birds would die of exhaustion or starvation.

Sightings are of course not guaranteed, and you'll have the best luck seeing the birds from around the Tanjung Tuan Lighthouse between 11am and 3pm when the heat of the day creates thermals for the birds to soar on.

The **Raptor Watch Festival** is held during the height of the migratory period, usually during the first week of March when the lighthouse opens to the public, jungle walks are led by naturalists, live bands come out to the cape to play and more. For more information and specific dates for the next festival go to <http://mnsrw2012.wordpress.com>.

TOP CHOICE Thistle Port

Dickson Resort

RESORT \$\$\$

(☎648 2828; www.thistle.com/asia; Jln Pantai, Km 16; r from RM496; 🍷🍷🍷) Set in 90 acres of landscaped grounds with manicured lawns, a private 3km beach, a golf course, magnificent pool, beautiful views, a fitness centre and more, this resort is one of the most luxurious and classy in the region. Large rooms have an appealing contemporary design.

PNB Ilham Resort

RESORT \$\$

(☎662 6800; www.ilhamresort.com; Batu 10, Tanjung Biru, Km 16; r from RM278; 🍷🍷🍷) Next to Cape Rachado Forest Reserve, this is a massive, elegant resort on a calm bay. The rooms are stylish with hardwood floors and muted light. There's a great pool and a quiet stretch of white-sand beach. It rents out mountain bikes and has plenty of other activities on offer.

Casa Rachado Beach Resort

RESORT \$\$

(☎662 5177; www.casarachadoresort.com; Batu 10, Tanjung Biru, Km 16; r from RM102; 🍷🍷🍷) This brightly painted resort is near the Cape Rachado Forest Reserve entrance. Rooms are a little musty but upgrading to a suite gets you an apartment-sized place with a kitchen and views of the sea. There's a tiny mangrove-fringed beach out the front and an OK pool. You can also camp here for RM50 for two people – tent, floor mat and kerosene lantern included.

Eagle Ranch Resort

RESORT \$\$\$

(☎6610 495; www.eagleranch.com.my; Batu 14, Jln Pantai; r RM125-250; 🍷🍷🍷) Around 23km

south of Port Dickson and not near a good beach, this unique Wild West-styled resort is worth considering if only for the chance to stay in a tepee (RM125) or covered wagon (RM200). There's an obstacle course and a vast range of other activities too.

Corus Paradise Resort

RESORT \$\$

(☎647 7600; www.corusparadisepd.com; Jln Pantai, Km 3.5; r from RM238; 🍷🍷🍷) This is a kitschy kid-friendly choice with a protected artificial lagoon and a big pool with water slides. Rooms are plain but comfortable and there is a handful of mediocre on-site restaurants.

Selesa Beach Resort

RESORT \$\$

(☎647 4090; www.selesabeachresort.com; Jln Pantai, Km 8; r from RM280; 🍷🍷🍷) Minangkabau-style resort with sea-facing rooms, all with small balcony and rather old-style furniture. This is a particularly good stretch of beach.

Kong Ming Hotel

HOTEL \$

(☎662 5683; Km 13; d from RM35) Seriously old and rundown but right on the beach, this place is clean, friendly and exudes a gritty, ancient charm.

Rotary Sunshine Camp Holiday Hostel

HOSTEL \$

(☎647 3798; Jln Pantai, Km 5; dm/r RM10/25) Despite its less than salubrious exterior – a cluster of blue barracks-style buildings behind a chain-link fence – this hostel is so well tended and the staff so friendly that it'll soon win you over. Shower and cooking facilities are shared and it's a short walk to a good beach

and cheap food. On weekdays you'll probably have the place to yourself.

Eating

There's a **night market** with yummy local food stalls every Saturday, but daily beach-side food is limited to a few mediocre food courts, seafood *rumah makan* (stalls) selling crab by the kilo (around RM30) and restaurants at the resorts.

PD Eating Point

MALAY, CHINESE \$

(8 Taman Segahtera, Jln Seremban; mains RM4-5; ☎7am-11pm; 🍴) About 1km north of PD town is this old-style coffee shop serving tasty hawker foods as well as all-day Western-style breakfasts. They also have free wi-fi.

El Cactus

BAR \$\$

(☎012-646 3772; Km 4, Lot 2674, Jln Pantai; meals RM25; ☎5.30pm-midnight) A relaxing spot for

dinner or a nightcap or two, with outside seating, a music system creatively mounted atop half a Fiat, lounge area and pool table.

Getting There & Around

Buses depart for Seremban (RM4, one hour, every 20 minutes) from where you can get connections to KL, Melaka and beyond. The taxi station is next to the bus station in the centre of town; taxi fares include Melaka (RM120), Seremban (RM50) and KL (RM130).

From Port Dickson town, local buses (RM1) run about every hour and will drop you off wherever you like along the beach. Ubiquitous share taxis are more reliable and convenient and cost RM2 for the first three or four kilometres – expect to pay RM5 to RM15 to get from Port Dickson town to your hotel (depending on the distance). You can flag share taxis down anywhere from the side of the road.

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